



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service



# Jackass Flat Sage-Grouse Habitat Improvement Project Scoping Document

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Bridgeport Ranger District  
Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest



# Jackass Flat Sage-Grouse Habitat Improvement Project

## Scoping Document

The US Forest Service, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Bridgeport Ranger District is planning a project to improve Bi-State sage-grouse habitat. This scoping document describes the purpose and need for the project, the project location, and a preliminary treatment proposal so that you can provide comments and help to improve the project. Instructions on how to comment and who to contact for more information are at the end of this document.

The responsible official for the Jackass Flat Project is Janette Cutts, Bridgeport District Ranger. Federal regulations allow the US Forest Service to exclude from documentation in an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS) categories of actions that do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment, based on the agency's experience and knowledge. Unless extraordinary circumstances are found to exist, the proposed action falls under the category listed at 36 CFR 220.6(e)(6): *"Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction."*

### Purpose and Need for the Project

The purpose of the Jackass Flat project is to improve habitat conditions for bi-state sage grouse, a sensitive species on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest and in the Forest Service Intermountain Region. Consistent with the revised 1986 Toiyabe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan<sup>1</sup>, including the 2016 Greater Sage-grouse Bi-state Distinct Population Segment Forest Plan Amendment<sup>2</sup> and conservation strategies defined in the Bi-State Sage-Grouse Action Plan<sup>3</sup>, the project is designed to:

Reduce pinyon-juniper expansion into sagebrush ecosystems and riparian areas;

Reduce pinyon-juniper stand conversion. As pinyon-juniper stands move from early successional Phase 1 and 2 into Phase 3 (where trees are the dominant vegetation and the primary plant layer influencing ecological process on the site), restoration of sagebrush-steppe communities becomes more difficult and costly due to loss of understory vegetation and changes in site conditions;

Increase sagebrush habitat connectivity; and

Reduce availability of perches for sage-grouse predators.

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<sup>1</sup> 1986 Toiyabe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan available at [http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5143054.pdf](http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5143054.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Greater Sage-grouse Bi-state Distinct Population Segment Forest Plan Amendment Record of Decision available at [http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa\\_project\\_exp.php?project=40683](http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa_project_exp.php?project=40683)

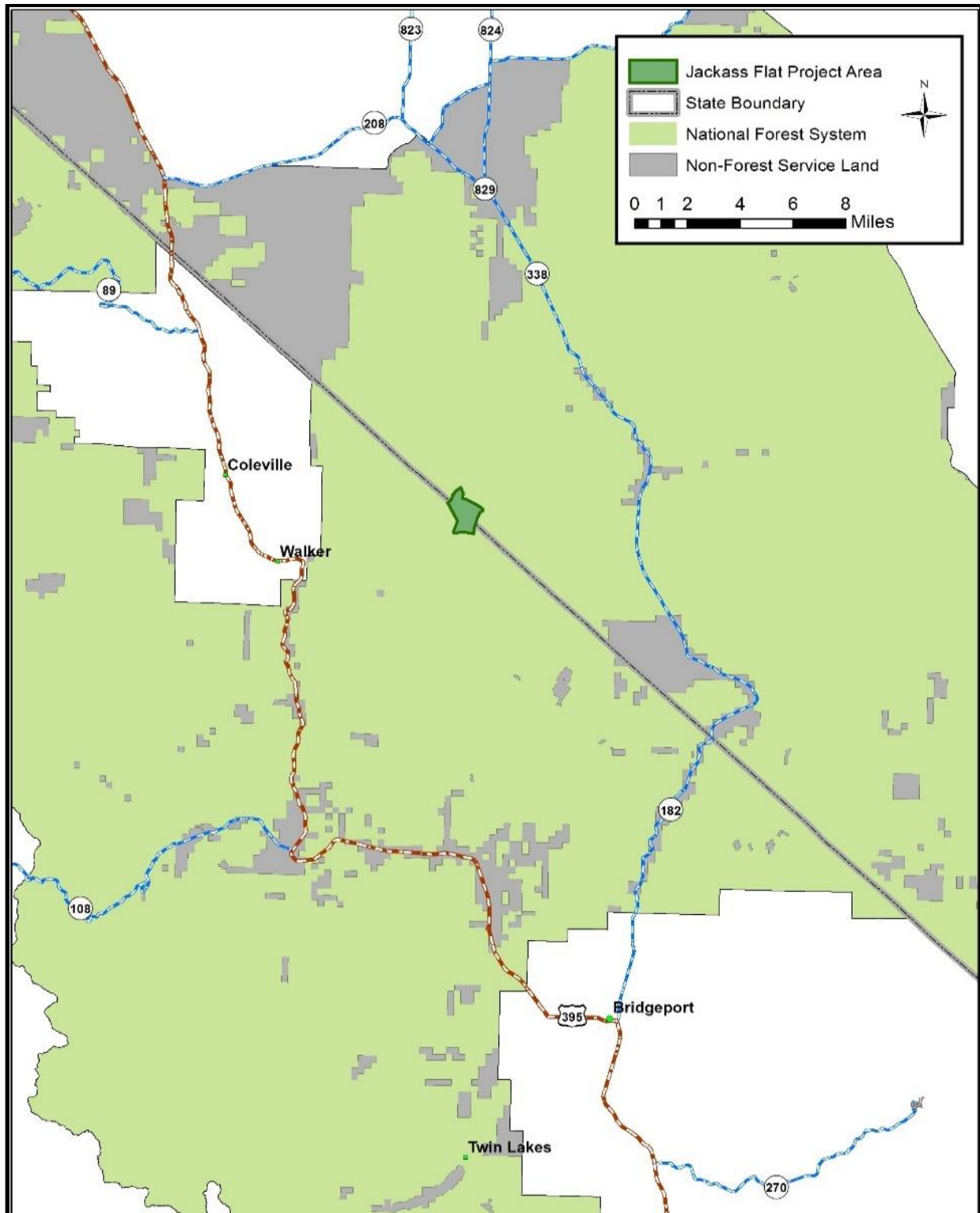
<sup>3</sup> 2012 Bi-State Action Plan: Past, Present, and Future Actions for Conservation of the Greater Sage-grouse Bi-state Distinct Population Segment, available at [http://www.ndow.org/uploadedFiles/ndoworg/Content/public\\_documents/Nevada\\_Wildlife/Bi-State%20Action%20Plan.pdf](http://www.ndow.org/uploadedFiles/ndoworg/Content/public_documents/Nevada_Wildlife/Bi-State%20Action%20Plan.pdf)

The project is needed because pinyon and juniper trees in the project area are encroaching upon nesting, brood-rearing, and winter habitat for the sage-grouse and decreasing sage-grouse habitat quality and availability.

The Jackass Flat project is a critical part of the 2012 Bi-State Action Plan, a comprehensive interagency strategy to provide for the long-term conservation of the Bi-State sage-grouse and its habitat through the implementation of habitat improvement treatments, administrative actions, research, and monitoring.

### **Project Location**

The project is located on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Bridgeport Ranger District, Lyon County, Nevada and Mono County, CA, S9 T8N R24E, S13 T8N R24E and S15-S21 T8N R24E (Map 1). The project area includes approximately 875 acres of land and lies entirely within the Fourth of July Spring Inventoried Roadless Area. The project area lies on the border of California and Nevada, northeast of Walker, CA, and west of Sweetwater Flat in NV. The area will be accessed from the west, by Risue Road and Forest Service Road 195. The parking area and turnaround to be used is located approximately 800 m south of the project area. This area was not directly impacted by the 2020 Mountain View fire and access to the site will not cross impacted areas.



Map 1. Project location.

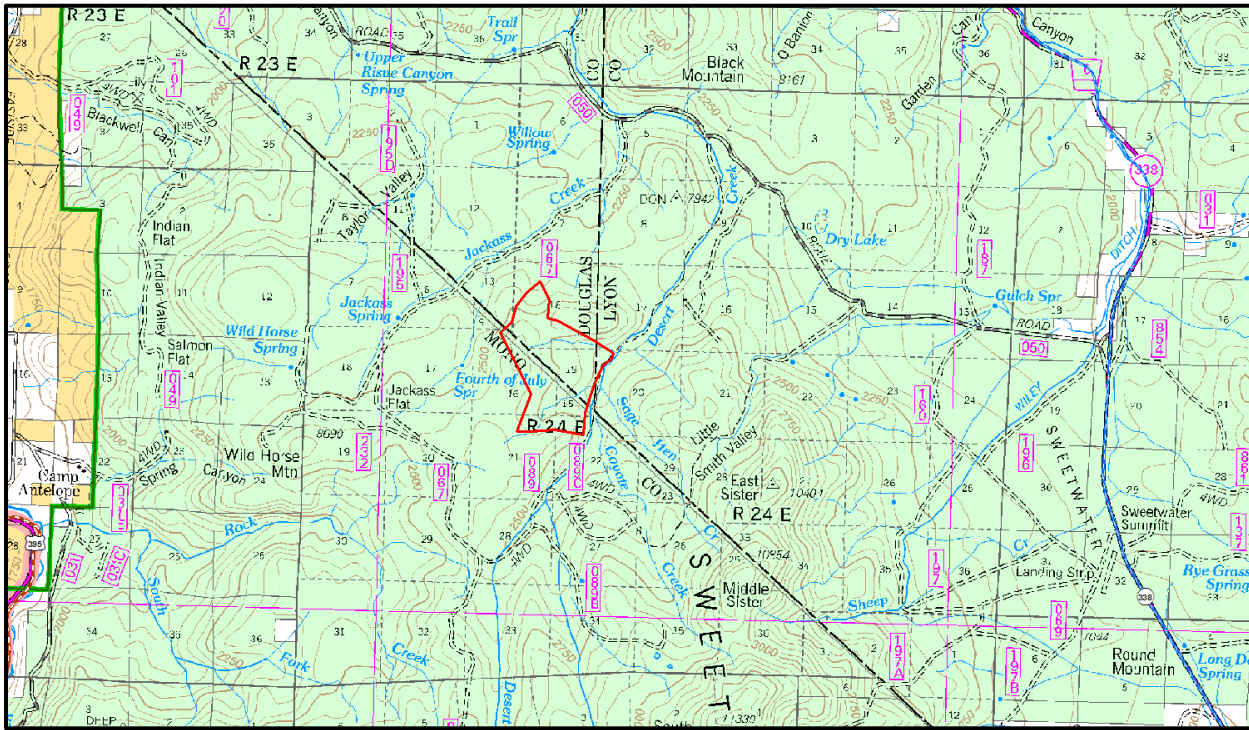




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**Figure 2. Jackass Flat project location on Bridgeport Ranger District visitor Map, showing access from the Risue Road at the north end of Sweetwater Flat.**

## Preliminary Proposal

### Pinyon-Juniper Treatments

The Forest Service proposes to remove pinyon pine and juniper on up to 875 acres within the Jackass Flat project area. Treatment methods would be limited to hand cutting with lopping and scattering in Phase 1 and Phase 2 woodland encroachment areas. Treatment would not occur in Phase 3 or higher density areas, rock outcrops, in areas where little to no ground vegetation currently exists, or in the bottom or sides of steep drainages. Trees exhibiting characteristics of persistent woodlands would not be cut. During hand cut, lop, and scatter work, hand crews would use chainsaws to cut down pinyon and juniper trees. Depending on the size of the trees, branches would be lopped (cut) off the trunk of the tree and scattered so all wood and branches are within 18 inches of the ground. Trees and branches would generally be left on site to decompose naturally.

### Ongoing Consultation and Coordination

This project will be coordinated and consulted with Tribal leadership and will be submitted to California and Nevada SHPO for consultation, as required under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. These efforts are currently underway.





## Design Features

The Jackass Flats project will be implemented in compliance with all standards and guidelines identified in the Toiyabe Forest Plan, including the 2016 Greater Sage-grouse Bi-state Distinct Population Segment Forest Plan Amendment (“Bi-state amendment”). The following design features are specific to the Jackass Flats project area and treatments.

## Weed Management

1. Vehicles may not drive cross-country or off established routes.
2. Contract will require all vehicles and mechanical equipment to be cleaned prior to entry on National Forest lands, to remove all dirt, plant parts, and other material that could carry noxious weed seeds into the area.
3. Equipment will only be staged (parked) in weed-free areas.
4. New small infestations of priority weed species identified prior to or during project implementation would be avoided by vehicles until the infestation has been effectively treated to eliminate spread. If larger infestations are identified, they will be isolated and avoided by vehicles, or vehicles would be washed before leaving the infested area.
5. Post-project monitoring and treatment (if needed) of noxious weeds would be conducted for a period of two years after completion of the project.

## Cultural Resource Protection

1. Heritage resources (those recommended eligible or unevaluated (contributing) for the National Register of Historic Places) will be marked as necessary and treated according to the recommendation of the Forest Service project archaeologist. The project’s border was adjusted in one instance to remove a sensitive location from the project’s footprint.
2. If archaeological sites are discovered during project implementation, activities within 200 feet of the discovery will cease, pending consultation with the Forest Service project archaeologist.

## Sensitive Plant Protection

3. Known occurrences of Bodie Hills draba (*Cusickiella quadricostata*) will be flagged by the botanist assigned to the project and avoided by project activities. These occurrences will be displayed as polygons on contract maps and monitored by the contract Inspectors.
4. New occurrences of threatened, endangered, proposed, or sensitive plant species discovered before or during project implementation would be flagged by the botanist assigned to the project and avoided by project activities.

## Timing of Operations

5. Treatments will not occur between March 1 and July 15 to avoid disturbance during sage-grouse breeding and nesting seasons and migratory bird nesting, and due to forest health concerns. This time frame may shift up to 14 days in atypically dry or wet years based on observations of breeding/nesting activity and forest pest activity.
6. If increased pinyon engraver bark beetle (*Ips confusus*) activity and pinyon pine mortality is identified in residual stands in or near the project area, additional slash specifications may be required. These specifications may include:



- a. Extending the timeframe implementation is not allowed based on beetle life cycles, as well as recommendations from Forest Health Protection.
- b. In areas where higher densities of pinyon and juniper are present (resulting in a heavier amount of activity slash), boles and limbs may be required to be bucked into smaller sizes in order to discourage beetle habitat and breeding.

## How to Comment

The Forest is seeking comments to help improve this project. Comments would be most helpful if received by Feb. 1, 2020. Comments can be submitted by mail, over the phone, in person, or by email.

Written comments should be submitted to the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Bridgeport Ranger District, Attn: Jan Cutts, HC62 Box 1000, Bridgeport CA 93517. Oral and hand-delivered comments must be provided at the Responsible Official's office during normal business hours (8:00 am to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays). Telephone comments can be submitted to the Responsible Official at 760-932-7070.

Electronic comments must be submitted to:

<https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public/CommentInput?project=59125> .

Comments, names, and contact information of those who comment will be part of the public record for this project. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, the District will not be able to send further project information to anonymous commenters.

## For More Information

This information is also available online at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=59125>.

For more information, please contact Anne Orlando, Project team leader, at [anne.orlando@usda.gov](mailto:anne.orlando@usda.gov) or (760) 932-5853.